

FINDINGS: Systematic, ongoing, and egregious religious freedom violations continue in Eritrea. These violations include: arbitrary arrests and detentions without charge of members of unregistered religious groups; torture or other ill-treatment of religious prisoners, sometimes resulting in death; a prolonged ban on public religious activities by all unrecognized religious groups; closure by the authorities of the places of worship of these groups; inordinate delays on registration applications from religious groups; and the disruption of private religious gatherings and social events of members of unregistered groups.

In light of these violations, USCIRF again recommends in 2010 that Eritrea be designated as a “country of particular concern,” or CPC. Since 2004, Eritrea has been recommended for CPC status by the Commission and designated as such by the State Department. In September 2005, when renewing the CPC designation, the State Department announced the denial of commercial export to Eritrea of defense articles and services covered by the Arms Export Control Act. This was the first, and so far only, unique presidential action under the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 (IRFA) in response to a CPC designation.

The religious freedom situation in Eritrea remains grave, particularly for Jehovah’s Witnesses, members of other smaller, non-traditional religious groups such as Evangelical and Pentecostal Christians, and dissident Muslims. The government continues to intervene in the internal affairs of the Orthodox Church of Eritrea, the country’s largest Christian denomination, and to suppress Muslim religious activities or groups viewed as radical or simply as opposed to the government-appointed head of the Muslim community. Despite these well documented reports, Eritrean officials continue to deny that there is religious repression in Eritrea, claiming that their actions are necessary to maintain social harmony.

PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS: USCIRF recommends that, in addition to continuing the

existing IRFA sanction on Eritrea, the U.S. government should impose targeted sanctions against individuals and institutions identified as responsible for, or complicit in, serious human rights abuses, as well prohibit any foreign company's raising capital or listing its securities in the United States while engaged in developing Eritrea's mineral resources. USCIRF further recommends that the U.S. government engage in vigorous advocacy of religious freedom at all levels of involvement with the government of Eritrea, draw international attention to religious freedom abuses in Eritrea, encourage unofficial dialogue with Eritreans on religious freedom issues, condition any resumption of development assistance to Eritrea on measurable improvements in religious freedom, and intensify international efforts to resolve the current political impasse between Eritrea and Ethiopia. Additional recommendations for U.S. policy toward Eritrea can be found in the 2010 Annual Report chapter on Eritrea and by following this link: <http://www.uscirt.gov/images/ar2010/eritrea2010.pdf>